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ABSTRACT

The content of elementary school reading methods textbooks spanning approximately 100 years was analyzed to note patterns of emphasis for selected topics. Four to six books were chosen for analysis from each of six time periods: 1890 to 1930, and each of the decades from the 1940s to the 1980s. Each book was evaluated with a checklist of 17 major topics usually included in a reading methods course. The number of pages devoted to each topic and the percentage of the total book that number represented were computed. The analysis showed that, in most cases, methods textbook content reflected actual instructional practices. Oral reading, for example, received much coverage in the early 1900s, but little in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. The instructional prominence of the basal reader in the 1950s and the interest in and research about comprehension in the 1980s were both reflected in the textbooks of their respective time periods. Recent interest in children with special needs also received emphasis in the textbooks of the 1970s and 1980s. The findings support the idea that college instructors present a fairly stable body of reading knowledge to preservice elementary school teachers. (FL)

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THE READING METHODS TEXTBOOK - CHANGES AND TRENDS

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the content of elementary reading methods textbooks, spanning nearly 100 years, to note patterns of emphasis for selected topics. Trends such as a lag behind instructional practices, synchronization with current instructional practices or wide pendulum swings in amount of coverage devoted to a particular topic were investigated. In most cases methods textbook content reflected actual instructional practices, such as oral reading receiving much coverage in the early 1900's and little coverage in the early 1960's, 1970's and 1980's. Cases were also noted where the amount of methods textbook coverage of a topic was inversely related to its instructional popularity. Overall, there appeared to be a fairly stable body of knowledge about reading which college instructors present to preservice elementary teachers. Awareness of patterns of emphasis, however, may provide insight for reading educators as they attempt to prepare teachers for the future.

THE READING METHODS TEXTBOOK - CHANGES AND TRENDS

The reading methods course and accompanying textbook are standard components of most elementary teacher education programs. The contents of the course and text, however, are not so standard and these variations, studied historically, reflect educational and societal changes.

Although professors personalize their courses, the reading methods textbook plays an important role in determining course content and organization. For the student, the content of this book probably helps shape attitudes toward and practices of teaching reading. Later on, it may also serve as a reference for the new teacher. Do these books follow the "pendulum swings" of education? Do they emphasize the newest "fads"? Have they expanded their scope of topics? Do they correlate with the educational practices of their times? These questions are interesting and important ones for teacher educators and others who wish to critically examine the field of reading.

To try to answer some of these questions, the authors conducted a content analysis study of reading methods textbooks from the early 1900's to the present. Using a sampling of typical textbooks chosen from six different time periods, the topics covered and their relative emphasis were examined. The findings for the various time periods were compared, looking for trends as well as for statistically significant differences.

A literature review, in preparation for the study, revealed very little research relating to an analysis of methods textbook content from an historical perspective. Some studies look at several current

textbooks' coverage of a single issue such as Sadker, Sadker and Garies (1980) with sexism or Heffernan (1980) and phonics generalization research. Also, Nelson (1981) tried to analyze several current social studies methods textbooks by rating their comparative coverage of key topics. The close connection between the methods textbook content and course content is documented by both Fox and Pritchard (1978) and Mooney (1975) but changes, historically, in these methods textbooks have apparently not been studied.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

To more clearly understand trends and changes in reading methods textbooks, a brief historical overview of reading instruction for the time period studied is helpful. Quotations from some of the methods textbooks illustrate key points.

In the late 1800's, reading instruction included an emphasis on oral reading from basic readers which contained tales and excerpts from classics (Lapp & Flood, 1983). In 1898, a methods textbook, with one chapter devoted to oral reading, states:

> The teacher is heartily advised to gather a dozen or more extracts and speeches under three or four significant heads, such as patriotism, love of nature, etc., and to keep the class at each phase until definite results are attained. (Clark, 1898, p. 183)

Also during the late 1800's there was an emphasis on the artificial or synthetic phonics system. With this method, the children learned the sound-symbol relationships in isolation and then put sounds together to pronounce new words. (Lapp & Flood, 1983)

Instructional emphasis in the early 1900's switched from phonics to the look-and-say method (Lapp & Flood, 1983). Nila Banton Smith relates another marked contrast from the past by stating there was "an exaggerated and, in some cases, almost exclusive emphasis upon silent reading procedures." (Smith, 1965, p. 159) This stress was witnessed in a methods book lamenting the "fetish of oral reading":

> Not only do we place too great an emphasis on oral reading, but we begin it too early in the school life of the child. The popular superstition is that plenty of drill in oral reading in the classroom prepares for efficiency in silent reading in the post-school days. (Klapper, 1917, p. 23)

During the early 1900's testing was also initiated, as evidenced by the appearance of the Gray Oral Reading Test in 1915. Studying the results of this text, teachers found that many students could not pronounce the words; and if they could pronounce the words, many did not know their meanings. The earlier emphasis on phonics was blamed, hence sight word instruction was advocated (Alexander, 1982, p. 504).

In the 1930's and 1940's, the basal method was widely used, including the teacher's manual and student workbook. Emphasis was on controlled vocabulary, both oral and silent reading, and phonics (Lapp

& Flood, 1983). A 1940's textbook writes of the newer basals: "Textbook publishers have made a noteworthy contribution to the teaching of reading." (Adams, Gray and Reese, 1949, p. 427) Basals are referred to as "vitalized textbooks" and praised with:

> From drab, uninteresting pages of difficult vocabulary and even more difficult concepts, the textbooks have been transformed into vivid, attractive, challenging presentations with simple vocabulary and full of meaningful ideas. (Adams, Gray and Reese, 1949, p. 427)

While phonics was more strongly emphasized in the 1950's and 1960's, other approaches also appeared, including individualization, words in color, language experience, programmed instruction, and in the late 1960's, linguistics. (Lapp & Flood, 1983) Nila Banton Smith stated two of the factors which were basically influential in shaping reading instruction during this time period: expanding knowledge and technological revolution. She writes:

> There is a compelling new objective to increase literacy. This new objective is lifting the horizon of reading far above its established bounds, and revealing vast new frontiers - frontiers of creativity, of responsibility, of obligation, and of privilege. (Smith, 1965, p. 308)

From the middle 1970's to the present, instructional emphasis lies with a large variety of materials, individualization, accountability, comprehension, the special student, and content reading. Language and its relationship to reading is also in the forefront.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

To analyze the content of reading methods textbooks, four to six books were selected from each of six time periods: early years (1890's-1930), 1940's, 1950's, 1960's, 1970's, and 1980's. The texts used for the earlier time periods were chosen because of their availability, although one could assume that the book was well-respected, if it is still readily available many years after publication. Newer texts were chosen because they seemed to the authors to be representative of the many methods textbooks on the market. Textbooks with an unusual format or specific emphasis were avoided.

Each textbook was evaluated with a checklist developed by the authors. The one-page checklist was constructed to be clear, concise and efficient to use. Seventeen major topics usually included in an elementary reading methods course were listed, including especially those where some changes might be anticipated based on the historical review of reading instruction. The number of pages devoted to each topic and the percentage of the total book which that number represented was computed for each textbook. The table of contents was the primary source of page number information, with the index or text as secondary sources if the table of contents was vague or incomplete.

To establish inter-rater reliability for the checklist, two of the authors independently analyzed the same two texts. The page counts were very similar, with many topics identical and the others varying only by two or three pages. For the study, the same two authors each analyzed half of the textbooks for each time period.

RESULTS

For each time period, the average percentage of content coverage for each topic was determined. (Table 1) Overall chi-square tests were run on each content category to determine if there were significant differences over time in percentages of coverage devoted to the given type of content. All obtained values of X^2 were significant beyond the .001 level.

Following this preliminary analysis, the distribution of percentages over time was examined in greater detail, topic by topic. The purpose of this analysis was to pinpoint specific discrepancies of interest and because of the large frequencies (of pages) involved in the chi-square analysis, proportionally very small differences might be resulting in statistically significant findings. Statistical significance, of course, does not always equal practical significance!

In order to perform this more detailed analysis, the overall percentage of content coverage for each topic was computed by dividing the combined number of pages devoted to a topic in all the time periods by the total number of pages in all the books. Next, considering the null hypothesis of no difference in percentages over time, it would be expected that there would be no difference between the overall percentage just determined and the percentage observed for each of the six individual time periods. Thus the percentage for each time period would be expected to approximate the overall proportion with respect to content coverage. After some thought and discussion the authors decided to identify a deviation of 2.5% above or below the expected

value as being of "practical significance." The 2.5% value represents approximately ten pages of coverage in a book. For example, "Foundations" averaged 8.5% content coverage over all time periods so if in any one time period the percent of coverage was less than 6% or more than 11% it was considered a significant deviation.

Several reading methods textbook topic areas showed more or less coverage over the time periods than the expected percentage range would predict. Coverage of the general category of Word Identification Skills, and the specific area of Phonics, was less than the expected proportion in methods textbooks of the 1940's. Comprehension received considerably less coverage than the expected proportion in 1890-1930 textbooks, slightly less in the 1970's textbooks and more than the expected proportion in 1980's books. Oral and silent reading both exceeded the expected proportion of coverage in the Early Years time period, but by the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's, oral reading dropped to less than the expected percentage of coverage in the books. The Basal Reader received more than the expected proportion of coverage in methods textbooks of the 1950's. Coverage of Evaluation was below the expected proportion in the 1890-1930 textbooks but exceeded it in the 1940's. Affective areas received more than the expected proportion of coverage in the Early Years time period, the 1940's and the 1960's but dipped slightly below that proportion in the 1980's textbooks. Coverage of Special Needs was below the expected proportion in the 1890-1930 methods textbooks but received more than the expected amount of coverage in 1970's and 1980's books. The topic of Content Area Reading got less than the expected proportion of coverage in textbooks from the Early Years

period. The results of this detailed analysis can be summarized in chart form (Table 2).

LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Before discussing the implications of this study, some limitations should be noted. First, the study examined only a part of the whole history of reading instruction. Different findings might emerge if earlier time periods were included. Second, methods textbooks were chosen based on availability, not necessarily their representative nature. Third, the table of contents or index proved to not always be a clear guide for counting the number of pages devoted to a topic. Content analysis is a challenging process and it does not always fit the usual data collecting procedures and statistical tests. Lastly, in not all instances was the number of pages an indicator of instructional emphasis for a topic. For example, an author may write several pages about oral reading, but it may be a discussion of how oral reading should not be stressed rather than a recommendation.

Interpreting the results, the authors did not find a clear pendulum effect, although there were some up or down variations in content emphasis in the reading methods textbooks. Most of these variations seem to correlate positively with the historical review of instructional practices.

Oral and silent reading were stressed instructionally around the turn of the century and were both emphasized in the methods textbooks of that period. Oral reading has lost favor instructionally in more recent years as methods textbooks of the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's

reflect. The instructional prominance of the basal reader in the 1950's and the instructional interest in and research about comprehension in the 1980's are reflected in methods textbooks of the respective time periods. The recent instructional interest in the Special Needs child generated by PL 94-142 received emphasis in 1970's and 1980's textbooks.

There was one instance when the reading methods textbook content seemed to correlate negatively with educational practices of the times. The textbooks from the 1940's gave less than the expected emphasis to the areas of Word Identification Skills, including Phonics. Instructionally, however, phonics was important during this period.

An interesting instance of the methods textbook possibly lagging behind instructional practice concerns the Basal Reader topic. Instructionally the basal reader was strong during the 1940's and 1950's, but methods textbooks didn't emphasize it until the 1950's.

This study seems to support the idea that there is a fairly stable body of knowledge about reading which is passed along to new teachers. The variations in content emphasis, however, may be important for college teachers to consider. The study suggests the importance of college teachers carefully thinking about the topics they teach their students so instruction can be balanced for the present and the future.

This study attempted to answer some questions and, in the process, raised some new ones. Some changes in content emphasis in reading methods textbooks of various time periods were noted, but what produces these changes? Are they a reaction to social pressures, school practices, research findings, prominent authors, funding sources or some combination of these factors? Also, how do the content emphases found in these

methods textbooks compare with a content analysis of the instructional practices suggested in basal reader manuals of the same time period? In other words, are methods textbooks reality based? There is much to be learned about where we have been and where we may be going through the study of reading methods textbook.

TABLE 1

MEAN PERCENTS OF CONTENT COVERAGE PER TOPIC FOR EACH TIME PERIOD

	1890-1930 (Early Years)	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s
1. Foundations (Language, history, definitions, psychology)	7.5	10.3	7.3	10.5	7.8	7.0
2. All Word Identification Skills	8.3	5.4	10.2	8.7	10.8	11.4
3. Sight Words	2.8	0.3	1.7	1.7	1.8	1.9
4. Phonics	5.7	0.9	2.6	3.1	5.6	5.7
5. Comprehension Skills, Including Vocabulary	3.6	9.1	9.9	12.3	7.4	16.2
6. Oral Reading	23.8	6.4	4.1	0.2	2.1	2.3
7. Silent Reading	4.8	3.3	1.6	0.0	0.7	0.5
8. Basal Readers	2.7	3.4	7.4	2.7	1.7	3.6
9. Language Experience Approach	0.0	0.7	0.6	0.9	1.8	1.8
10. Individualized Reading	0.0	0.1	0.0	2.1	1.3	1.8
11. Computer Assisted or Programmed Instruction	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.6	0.4
12. Intensive Phonics Approaches	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.8	0.8
13. Linguistic Emphasis (Regular Spelling Patterns)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	1.0	0.6
14. Evaluation (diagnosis, correction, record keeping)	1.9	11.6	8.4	7.5	8.5	5.8
15. Affective Areas (interests, attitudes, literature)	10.5	11.8	5.1	9.2	5.4	4.5
16. Special Needs Students	0.0	0.1	3.3	0.7	5.8	6.7
17. Content Area Reading and Study Skills	0.7	9.0	10.4	10.3	7.0	8.6

TABLE 2

READING METHODS TEXTBOOK DEVIATIONS FROM EXPECTED CONTENT PROPORTIONS

	1890-1930 (Early Years)	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s
1. Foundations (Language, history, definitions, psychology)						
2. All Word Identification Skills		-- **				
3. Sight Words						
4. Phonics		— **				
5. Comprehension Skills, Including Vocabulary	—				—	+ *
6. Oral Reading	+ *				— *	— *
7. Silent Reading	+ *				—	
8. Basal Readers		***	+ *			
9. Language Experience Approach						
10. Individualized Reading						
11. Computer Assisted or Programmed Instruction						
12. Intensive Phonics Approaches						
13. Linguistic Emphasis (Regular Spelling Patterns)						
14. Evaluation (diagnosis, correction, record keeping)	—	+				
15. Affective Areas (interests, attitudes, literature)	+	+		+		—
16. Special Needs Students	—	—			+ *	+ *
17. Content Area Reading and Study Skills	—					

+ = Deviation $\geq$ 2.5% above expectations
- = Deviation $\leq$ 2.5% below expectations
* = Positive correlation with instructional practices
** = Negative correlation with instructional practices
*** = Lagged behind instructional practices

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